



JOHN NAIMO
AUDITOR-CONTROLLER

**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, ROOM 525
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012-3873
PHONE: (213) 974-8301 FAX: (213) 626-5427

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TO: Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich, Mayor
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Don Knabe

FROM: John Naimo 
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT –
JULY 1 THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2014**

This memorandum is to provide you with information about the Auditor-Controller's Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) Program for the period of July 1 through December 31, 2014.

Background

The Ombudsman serves as an advocate for children placed in group homes (GH) by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). The Ombudsman provides a confidential and informal process to resolve issues that arise from children residing in GHs. The Ombudsman responds to requests for assistance (requests), which are generally received through a toll-free hotline, e-mail, and periodic site visits. The Ombudsman hotline number and e-mail address are included on posters which are required to be displayed in every County-contracted GH. In addition, Ombudsman staff conduct routine site visits encouraging children to call the hotline if they need assistance in resolving GH problems.

Upon receiving a request for assistance, the Ombudsman interviews the requester to obtain sufficient information to understand the situation and attempts to determine an appropriate response and/or course of action. The Ombudsman may also contact other parties, including DCFS personnel, GH providers, or others as needed to gather additional information, and also to facilitate a reasonable solution that is within the children's rights and established regulations.

According to the DCFS Child Welfare Services – December 2014 Fact Sheet (located at <http://www.lacdcfs.org/aboutus/factsheets.html>), 1,099 Los Angeles County children were placed in 178 GHs located within and outside the County.

Summary of Requests for Assistance

During this six-month reporting period, we received a total of 151 requests for assistance (142 via telephone and 9 during site visits). For comparison, the Ombudsman hotline received 112 requests for assistance in each of the prior two reporting periods.¹ Attachment I contains the specific data regarding the types of requests for assistance received by the Ombudsman.

Overall, 97 (64%) of the 151 requests (12 physical safety, 37 personal rights, and 48 “other” issues), were resolved within the Ombudsman’s purview. Attachment II identifies the group homes involved with the 97 requests for assistance. In order to ensure proper resolution of the requests, we completed various communications and referrals to DCFS’ Children’s Social Workers, Child Protection Hotline, Out-of-Home Care Management Division, Public Inquiry, and Youth Development Ombudsman. In addition, the Ombudsman frequently communicated and coordinated with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman, Probation GH Monitoring and Investigation Unit, State Community Care Licensing, GH staff/management, and occasionally other counties to ensure the requester’s issues were fully addressed, and that proper agencies were notified.

The remaining 54 requests involved individuals seeking general information (19 requests for information pertaining to GHs and 35 requests that were non-GH related). In such cases, the Ombudsman provided an answer or directed the requester to the appropriate party.

We noted that three GHs accounted for more than one third of the total requests for assistance we received during this period. These agencies operate large programs, and have other characteristics which may result in a higher volume of requests for assistance. In following up on these requests, we did not identify indications of systemic problems at these agencies. However, we will work with DCFS to provide additional outreach to children placed in these GHs.

The following are examples of hotline requests received and resolved within the purview of the Ombudsman:

- A female youth stated she was not comfortable interacting with male staff even though she did not have a specific negative experience within the GH. The youth requested the Ombudsman to speak with the GH on her behalf. The Ombudsman

¹ During our previous two semi-annual reports, we reported only requests received via telephone, which were 103 and 94 for the semi-annual periods ending June 2014 and December 2013, respectively.

spoke with the GH supervisor and explained the youth's general uncomfortable feelings with male staff. The GH supervisor wanted to respect her feelings and spoke with the youth to work out accommodating her request. The Ombudsman followed up with the youth and she stated she has minimal interaction with male staff, only when necessary, and is feeling more comfortable.

- A male youth stated that he was not allowed to ride his bicycle and was not provided an explanation for the denial. The youth contacted the Ombudsman for assistance because the supervisor who denied his request was not immediately available and other staff were not aware of the reason for the denial. In order to expedite a resolution, the Ombudsman called the Program Director (Director), who was already aware of the situation. He stated the youth came back to the group home with a bicycle the youth did not previously have. The Director explained that prior to letting the youth ride his bicycle he wanted to ensure that it was obtained legally, but had not yet communicated that to the youth. After the Ombudsman spoke with the Director, he immediately contacted the youth and explained his concerns and obtained the youth's assurance that the bicycle was not stolen. Shortly thereafter, the youth was authorized to ride his bicycle.

Outreach

One of the Ombudsman's responsibilities is to visit GHs, and provide DCFS children and GH staff with information about the Ombudsman function. DCFS GH monitoring reports are reviewed, and visits are prioritized based on concerns reported by residents or information obtained from the Sybil Brand Commission, Commission for Children and Families, and DCFS Special Audit Committee meetings. In addition, requests received from GH residents may trigger additional announced and/or unannounced visits.

During this reporting period, new Ombudsman posters were designed and distributed to all of the group homes to be prominently displayed. The new designs are contemporary and more appealing to youth.

During this reporting period, the Ombudsman visited 33 GHs, including some providers with multiple sites. Five (5) of those visits were conducted jointly with the Probation Ombudsman as some group homes have both DCFS and Probation-placed youth. The joint outreach visits increase awareness and clarity about the resources available to GH residents. The Ombudsman provided 139 children with information about available services through verbal presentations and flyers/brochures. During these visits, GH residents had the opportunity to ask questions and request assistance. Attachment III identifies the group home site visits completed during the reporting period.

Conclusion

We will continue to conduct GH visits during the next reporting period, and coordinate with the Probation Ombudsman where group homes have both DCFS and Probation-placed youth. We will also continue to ensure that lines of communication remain open with youth residing in group homes so they receive requested assistance when needed.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call me or your staff may contact Michelle Day, Children's Group Home Ombudsman, at (213) 893-0551 or via e-mail at mday@auditor.lacounty.gov.

JN:RGC:GZ:GH:md

Attachments (3)

c: Sachi A. Hamai, Interim Chief Executive Officer
Fesia Davenport, Interim Director, Office of Child Protection
Philip L. Browning, Director, DCFS
Jerry E. Powers, Chief Probation Officer
Audit Committee
Children's Deputies
Commission for Children and Families
Out-of-Home Care Management Division, DCFS
Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance, Probation
Probation Ombudsman
Public Information Office
Sybil Brand Commission

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
HOTLINE REQUESTS RECEIVED
BY TYPE**

July 1, 2014 through December 31, 2014

1. Physical Safety Issues	12
Fear, Threats, Intimidation, Isolation	6
Discipline	3
Physical Harm	2
Neglect	1
2. Personal Rights Issues	37
Respect	7
School	7
Clothing	6
Food	5
Living Conditions	5
Social Contacts	4
Health/Medical, Dental, Psychiatric Care	2
Allowance	1
3. "Other" Issues	48
Personal Belongings/ Property/Hygiene Products	10
CSW Contact	7
County Social Worker (CSW) Issues	6
Placement	5
Staff Issues	2
Peer Issues	2
Self-Harm	2
Cottage and Room Placement	2
Independent Living Program	2
Attorney Contact/Court Date	2
Probation Officer Issues	1
Child Visits	1
Medical Records Request	1
Family Reunification	1
Privacy	1
Medi-Cal Information	1
Room Search	1
Court Apointed Special Advocate (CASA) Contact	1
4. All Issue Types Above - Total	97
5. General Information	54
GH- Related	19
Non-GH Related	35
6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsman	151

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
HOTLINE REQUESTS RECEIVED
BY GROUP HOME**

July 1, 2014 through December 31, 2014

Group Home	Supervisory District / Out of County	Number of Requests	Types of Issues
B & I Group Home	1	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowance • Staff Issues • Living Conditions
Maryvale	1	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothing (2) • Respect
San Gabriel Children's Center	1, 5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSW Contact
Fred Jefferson Memorial Homes	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Issues
Pinnacle Foundation	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline
Trinity Youth Services - El Monte (Probation Only)	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living Conditions (2)
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	2	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Harm (2) • School
Aviva Center	3	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Reunification • Independent Living Program • Placement • Fear, Threats, Intimidation, Isolation
Children Are Our Future	3, 5	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Property (2) • Attorney Contact/Court Date
Children's Homes of Southern California	3	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health/Medical, Dental, Psychiatric Care • Fear, Threats, Intimidation, Isolation
Human Services Network	3	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food
Los Angeles Youth Network	3	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Belongings (2) • Staff Issues
Penny Lane Centers	3, 5	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Property/ Hygiene Products (3) • CSW Issue (2) • Food (2) • Fear, Threats, Intimidation, Isolation (2) • Attorney Contact • Physical Harm • Probation Officer Issues • Placement • Social Contacts • Discipline • Respect • School
Bayfront Youth & Family Services	4	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect
Dream Home Care, Inc.	4	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect • Health/Medical, Dental, Psychiatric Care

Group Home	Supervisorial District / Out of County	Number of Requests	Types of Issues
Careprovider Children and Family Services	5	1	• Respect
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services	5	15	• CSW Contact (5) • CSW Issue (3) • Social Contacts (2) • Placement (2) • Independent Living Program • Medical Records Request • Fear, Threats, Intimidation, Isolation
Fleming & Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent - Lancaster	5	2	• CSW Issue • Neglect
Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services	5	2	• CSW Contact • CASA Contact
Macro Homes, Inc.	5	1	• Personal Property
Murrell's Farm and Boys Home	5	5	• Respect • Personal Property • Privacy • Medi-Cal Information • Fear, Threats, Intimidation, Isolation
Rosemary Children's Services	5	5	• Clothing (2) • Food • School • Physical Harm
Florence Crittenton Services for Children and Families	Orange County	9	• School (3) • Discipline • Room Search • Peer Issues • Child Visits • Clothing • Food
Mary's Shelter	Orange County	1	• Placement
Paragon Center	Orange County	1	• Social Contacts
Childhelp USA – Beaumont	Riverside County	3	• Cottage and Room Placement (2) • School
Future Stars Youth Services	Riverside County	1	• Respect
Field Comprehensive Youth Services	San Bernardino County	2	• Personal Property • Clothing
Trinity Youth Services - Apple Valley (Probation Only)	San Bernardino County	2	• Living Conditions (2)
	TOTAL	97	

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
GROUP HOME SITE VISITS FOR OUTREACH**

July 1, 2014 through December 31, 2014

Group Home	Number of Sites	Supervisory District(s) / Out of County	Site Visit Location(s)
West Covina Foster Family Agency dba Homes of Hope, Inc., Casa Esperanza Treatment Center	1	1	Pomona
Garces Residential Care Services	1	1	Claremont
B & I Group Home	2	1	Pomona
San Gabriel Children's Center*	3	1 5	Covina
Luvlee's Residential Care, Inc., dba New Dawn Group Home	2	1, San Bernardino County	Walnut (1) Chino (1)
Aviva Center *	1	3	Los Angeles
Penny Lane Centers*	11	3, 5	North Hills (11)
Dream Home Care, Inc.	3	4	Long Beach (3)
Fleming and Barnes, Inc., dba Dimondale Adolescent Care - Lancaster	1	5	Lancaster
Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services*	1	5	Altadena
Heritage Group Homes, Inc.	1	5	La Verne
LeRoy Haynes Boys Home*	1	5	La Verne
Macro Homes, Inc.	1	5	Lancaster
Murrell's Farm and Boys Home	2	5	Lancaster (2)
Turmont Home for Boys and Girls	1	5	Lancaster
West Covina Group Home	1	San Bernardino County	Chino
Total	33		

*Joint outreach visits with the Probation Ombudsman